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Wm. J. Talbot

# ADDRESS

OF

SIR ROUNDELL PALMER, M.P.,

TO THE

PRESENT AND PROSPECTIVE ELECTORS

OF THE

*BOROUGH OF RICHMOND, YORKSHIRE,*

IN THE TOWN HALL, RICHMOND.

ON THE TWENTY-FIRST DAY OF AUGUST, 1868.

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ALDERMAN LEONARD COOKE IN THE CHAIR.

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RICHMOND:

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## ADDRESS.

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SIR ROUNDELL PALMER said: I need hardly tell you that from the time when I first heard that there was likely to be a contest at the coming election, it was my anxious desire to take the earliest opportunity of coming before you, appealing to your kind consideration for a candid judgment of my conduct in time past, and placing before you on my part with equal candour that which, it occurs to me, you would properly expect me to say as to what is to come. I have not the honour at present, or the advantage, personally, to know the gentleman who is to be my competitor for your confidence at the coming election. I have seen in the public prints that he has spoken personally of myself with the greatest courtesy, which I am very glad to acknowledge. I hope, on my part, that I shall always speak of him and his pretensions to your suffrages with equal courtesy. I believe him to be a gentleman in every sense of the word, and I acknowledge that he has a perfect right to come among you and to appeal, upon his own merits, and upon the merits of the principles which he advocates, to you for your support, either against myself or against any other man. I hope I shall not be thought too presumptuous if I venture to think I may have some advantage before you, without any fault of his, in comparison with one who is as well as myself locally unconnected with Richmond, (A voice: "You know where the advantage is," Cries of "Order," and "Put him out," Confusion.) I do not think that the gentleman who spoke will interrupt again. (Another voice: "He has no voice, Sir,") If you mean a vote, I have just as much respect for those who have not votes as for those who have; and therefore am just as desirous to enjoy the confidence of those who have not votes as the confidence of those who have. (Hear, hear.) And I am sure that that gentleman will show he is a man whose confidence an honest man should wish to possess, by hearing patiently all I have got to say. (Applause.) And now to return to what I was about to say—I hope I may have some advantage over my competitor, by reason of the length of time that I have already had the honour to

represent this borough. You will remember that I first came here when LORD PALMERSTON, at that time in charge of Her Majesty's Government, thought me a fit person to be employed in Her Majesty's service, in one of the offices under the Crown. Those were difficult and anxious times, and it was difficult indeed for any one to pass through them unscathed. Far be it from me to pretend that no errors or mistakes were committed, either by myself or others ; but looking back to that period of time, I am sure the Government then was conducted honestly, with an intention to do justice to all classes of Her Majesty's subjects, and to preserve inviolate the good faith of the nation towards all foreign Countries. But, gentlemen, at the last general election I had to render you an account of my stewardship during that period of time. Some years have since elapsed, and there is now a further account to be rendered.

It was, if you will remember, in 1865 that I stood here by the side of a lamented friend, now no more, whom you then sent to Parliament as my colleague ; and we had to state to you our opinions upon various subjects of general public expectation and interest, which were then subjects of the future. I remember MR. DUNDAS telling you that he was prepared to vote for a considerable measure of Reform, and to pledge himself to the £6 franchise. If I don't mistake, I said at the same time, that Reform was a matter which I thought of very great importance, but which I liked to see practically treated ; and that I would rather not speak of the form of any particular measure, until I knew what was likely to be proposed, and what it might be possible to carry ; but that I had my opinions on the subject, which I would not object to express in due time. Well, gentlemen, the Government which succeeded LORD PALMERSTON produced an honest and considerable measure of Reform ; but I frankly confess, that, though bound as I was in all loyalty to support them in that measure, and though I did so without the smallest hesitation or doubt that I was doing my duty, yet that measure did not entirely correspond in all points with what my mind had conceived as the best and most satisfactory mode of settlement. I think those who have been newly admitted to the franchise may perhaps pardon me, if on an occasion like the present, when a man is inevitably compelled to speak of himself—a thing which to me is very distasteful—if on such an occasion I refer you, as evidence at all events that I was perfectly sincere in the support which I afterwards gave to the somewhat larger extension of the franchise proposed by the present Government, to an occasion which occurred in the year 1867, when MR. BRIGHT, who on that occasion was the mark of so much obloquy and scorn, as he is now of such general praise,—(Hear, hear.)—When MR. BRIGHT declared that he was in favour of a measure of Household Suffrage ; that he thought that was the right point to proceed to, and the right point also at which

to stop. For my own part, I thought that such a step might even at that time be taken with safety ; and, holding that opinion, I should even then personally have preferred taking it at once, to leaving it to be taken at two different stages, with the uncertainty of what might happen between, or under what circumstances the second step might have to be taken.

You know, therefore, that I am at all events not one of the modern converts to the doctrine of household suffrage. I was certainly not an advocate for precipitating the time, or for bringing the matter forward until I saw that it was practicable ; yet that was the opinion I had formed. With the exception of MR. BRIGHT, I believe I was the very first person to give utterance to that opinion in Parliament. Well, gentlemen, there was another thing in that bill which I did not personally like ;—the plan of grouping boroughs. Richmond was an example. It was proposed to marry Richmond to Northallerton. Now, I can understand any one saying that Richmond ought to have no member, or that Northallerton was not entitled to be directly represented, comparing the population and trade and other circumstances of these towns, with those of other towns ; but I cannot think it satisfactory, that two distant boroughs should be united, when they have no identity of interest. It did appear to me, therefore, that the principle was not a good one. I was, of course, not at all desirous to see the time come when Richmond should disappear from the number of represented communities. (Laughter.) But I would rather it should lose one of its members, than that it should be united to Northallerton.

The next thing of which I have to give an account is a matter about which I was not very much personally consulted ; though I most cordially approved of the act to which I refer—the resignation of LORD RUSSELL's Government. It seems to me to be a scandal to Government, when it has brought forward a measure on such an important question as that of Reform, and excited upon the subject the feelings and interests of the people, if it does not treat it as a measure by which, as a Government, it shall stand or fall. I have no hesitation in saying that MR. GLADSTONE and LORD RUSSELL took, in my judgment, the wise, the honourable, and the patriotic course in resigning. (Cheers.) There were many people who said : “Why don't you go on, and let your opponents alter the measure ?”--but that is not the way to serve the country. Allow the measures which you have initiated and brought forward to be subject to reasonable modification, but do not surrender any principles of the justice of which you are convinced. (Hear, hear!) Keep the control over those measures you think for the public good, and do not let them be pulled to pieces, spoiled, patched, and altered by your opponents, and then turn round to the country and say—“See what I have done !” When it is not your work at all. Stand upon the thing you think right and if the House of Commons does not

support you, then go out, unless you appeal to the country ; and let them, if they can, support some one who will do it better. (Hear, hear.) Well what was the practical effect of that ? The practical effect of it was—(A voice : “They were turned out.” Laughter and cheers.) They were turned out, certainly. But what was the result of that ? Why, that they were able to get more for the country than they could have got if they had stayed in. (Renewed cheers and laughter.) Now, Gentlemen, I have not come here to attack other people. I have come here to explain, and, if I can, to justify my own conduct in those important matters, and the conduct of those with whom I have been associated, (A voice : “And the conduct of the present Government.”) Not a bit of it. I assume that the present Government acted according to their sense of duty, both in what they opposed, and in what they proposed, with that I have nothing to do. I want you to understand what was the course which I, amongst others, took, when the Reform Bill was proposed by the present Government, which was ultimately carried. It was a very different thing when it was proposed, from what it was when it was eventually passed. A great deal was done with the rating clauses ; and we wished to do a good deal more towards simplifying them. In that respect, I did my best to support Mr. GLADSTONE ; and in the abolition of the fancy franchises and dual voting, I also took, as well as I could, my individual part. Then there were certain voting papers, which I thought would not have tended to diminish the effect of personal influence over voters, or to increase their independence. (Cheers.) I was amongst those who opposed the introduction of those papers. Lastly there was that measure which was carried by a majority in the House, and which I agreed with Mr. GLADSTONE in opposing—which as it seems to me has made the populous places which have three members rather worse off than those who have two ; for the latter will be represented by a majority of two votes in all important divisions ; while the former, through the representation of the minority, may have but a balance of one. I opposed that.

Mr. HAUXWELL : did you vote against it ?

SIR ROUNDELL PALMER : I did.

Mr. HAUXWELL : How many times did you vote on the question of Reform ?

SIR ROUNDELL PALMER : I believe I voted on the Reform Bill in almost every division which took place, and in certainly every important division, with the single exception of that one which proposed the total disfranchisement of seven Boroughs, when I happened to be absent. Those who have taken an interest in the debates which then took place, know that the part which I took was not a silent part, and that I actively took up the side, in those discussions, which I believed to be favourable to the people. I assisted Mr. GLADSTONE, to the best of my power, in the recent

settlement of the question of Church Rates; and I have been instrumental in calling the attention of Parliament and of the Government to the great importance of a general revision of the judicial system of this country, which I believe to be susceptible of very great improvements; the result of which was the appointment of a Commission for inquiry into that subject. (Hear, hear.) There have been other Commissions of importance, on which I have served; and to which I refer, for the double purpose of showing you what my own personal ideas of the meaning of Law Reform are—that they do not rest in mere general words and professions—and secondly, to indicate some of those subjects, on which practical Reformers may be expected, and on which I am disposed, strongly to advocate change. The object of one of those Commissions is to prepare the way for a general digest of the law, so as to make the law better known to the people, and remedy many of its defects. Another (which has recently made its Report), was appointed to inquire into the law of marriage, which is in a most anomalous and extraordinary condition, varying according to sectarian and other differences in England, Ireland, and Scotland. There are also the laws as to the observance of neutrality with foreign states, and as to Naturalization, the defective condition of which has given us so much trouble with America, and the difficulties in regard to which, have not yet been removed. In the business of all these Commissions I have taken, and in some of them I am at present taking, an active part.

Now, Gentlemen, I have done with the past, and propose to say something of the future; and it is impossible to approach the subject of the future without referring in some degree to those alarms and apprehensions in which I did not myself participate, but which were expressed by some persons of not inconsiderable eminence, as to the effect of the large extension of the Franchise which has now taken place. Amongst these was one of the most eloquent and able men in the Liberal ranks,—a personal friend of my own—MR. LOWE, who seemed to foresee innumerable dangers, if not general anarchy and confusion, as the probable consequences of such a measure of Reform. How that view could recommend itself to one so able and of so clear a mind, I for one, do not at all understand: and I am happy to observe that, although he seemed then to be so much alarmed, he does not now seem to be more frightened than other people. (Laughter.) On the contrary, he appears to have as good a heart in carrying reforms further as almost any one amongst us. (Hear, hear.) I therefore think I may take courage, and say, that I fail to see, in the way in which the arrangements for the forthcoming general election are being made, any signs of approaching anarchy or unusual corruption; it strikes me, that things are going on very much in the same way as they used to do, and that the relations of the different classes of society have not been

altered through the constitutional change which has taken place. There can be no real ground for alarm, if the people, generally, are sound at heart; if their conduct is such as to show on the whole that they are conscious of living under laws and institutions, which, although they may justly regard them as susceptible of constant improvement, they have no desire to change fundamentally, or entirely to abolish. I believe these questions can safely be answered in the affirmative, for it seems to me, that the different classes of society do, on the whole, live in natural, cordial, and kindly relations to one another, with a proper understanding of the great fundamental truth, that they have all a common interest—that in the state, as in the body, you cannot knock off the limbs or injure any one part of the body without injuring all;—that no class in the community can prosper by making war upon another class—in other words, that there should be no such thing as partiality in government, or legislation for any class at all. I think that the sense of that principle generally pervades the community. Of course, I do not mean that there are not exceptions to it. There are selfish and discontented people in every class. But the behaviour and conduct of the great masses of the people satisfies me that these matters are practically so felt and understood. Just as an illustration, look at one of our great cities:—London, Manchester, or any other city. In such a place all goes on harmoniously day by day. There are a vast number of people in every such place, struggling under difficulties, and often suffering severely from distress or want: yet the whole organization and life of those great communities tells the same tale, of liberty, law, and order, realized in the habits, and governing the sentiments, of the masses of the people, of every rank and calling. I have always felt that those who thought the heads of the working classes could not be entrusted with the franchise, did not know the people well, or they never could have had any such fears. Employers and employed, capital and labour, will have their contests from time to time; and even these contests, though accompanied by some excesses and abuses, may on the whole leave things better than they were before. No doubt abuses do occur, which are to be deplored, but they are not generally characteristic, either of the employers, or of the working people. The real bond of society is not found so much in the machinery, as in the results of government: there is little ground for fear, so long as all classes know that the laws are made in the interest of the governed. In this country, and wherever there is true freedom, the great object ought to be to reduce the interference of the law to the lowest point, and to rely, above all things, on the government of ourselves. That is the blessing England enjoys above all other countries in the world; and I wish to see it increased more and more: those things which are wrong in our institutions being changed, and those things which are good being made better.

(Cheers.) I believe there can be no life without growth and progress, in societies or states ; and I trust to the evidence of progress under former reforms, and to the evidence of the conduct and general morality of the masses of the people, as satisfying me that they have no evil designs ; that we need not be afraid of them ; that we may express with our hearts the sentiment for which MR. GLADSTONE was for a time vilified and ridiculed, that they are our fellow Christians, our own flesh and blood, having the same interests with ourselves, and in the sight of God as good as any of ourselves. (Cheers and slight disturbance.)

With regard to what has to be done in the future, I have already stated that I see my way to many improvements in our laws, both upon those subjects which I have referred to, and upon others which it is unnecessary here to mention ; I see my way to great improvements in the administration of the public departments, in public economy, in the system of taxation, and above all in the education of the people, which I desire to see extended, and made if possible universal. (Cheers.) I am not an advocate for obliging people, by direct legal compulsion, to send their children to schools maintained by the State ; and that for two reasons :—first, because I believe it would be totally impossible to carry it into effect ; and secondly, because I greatly prefer that there should, in that matter, as well as others, be liberty of choice. The State cannot directly maintain schools in which a denominational religion is taught. (Hear, hear.) The State may with great propriety largely supplement the means of schools in which religious education is given, as is done at present ; and may also with great advantage aid or create schools, where useful secular instruction may be given, in places where voluntary efforts do not supply them. I think denominational schools are doing an immense amount of good in the community, and that any attempt to supplant or supersede them, by a general system of compulsory State instruction, would be a step very far indeed from the right direction. (Cheers.) I wish, therefore, to see all possible aid and assistance given by the State to education—to see the direct establishment of schools for useful secular instruction where voluntary efforts prove insufficient ; but I do not wish to see any action on the part of the State, which shall interfere with or cripple in any way the schools of the different religious communities. (Hear, hear.)

I must now be permitted to say a few words as to the man who, I believe, is likely very soon to be called upon to take the lead in this course of improvement—I mean MR. GLADSTONE. (Loud cheers.) I think MR. GLADSTONE has many qualities eminently fitting him for so high a calling. I have known him long ; and I think, in point of conscientiousness, in point of earnestness, in point of vehement burning zeal against abuses of every kind, in point of disinterestedness, and in point of sympathy with the people at large, I have

never known any statesman who was his superior. And that appears to me to be a rare union of qualities; for in times like these, when great changes may no doubt excite a good deal of visionary enthusiasm, and when impulses towards change may prevail in many minds, very useful if they are turned into right channels, but dangerous if turned by any means into a wrong one—times in which, although not wishing to make observations on other people, I am bound to say that those who by profession are Conservative seem lately to have a little lost sight of their profession—in these times it is of the greatest importance that the man who may be called upon to take the lead in public progress should be a man having those qualities, of conscientiousness and disinterestedness more especially, which I have stated to you I fully believe MR. GLADSTONE to possess. (Hear, hear.) And that belief is founded upon considerable opportunities of observation. I am not at all sure that those very qualities have not stood to some extent in his way in the House of Commons. If he had watched men and the arts of the management of men more than he has done—if he had studied more how to catch chance majorities, how to play with the weaknesses of the people about him; if, in other words, he had thought more of his own position and less of public objects interesting to the Country, which were at his heart,—it is possible that he might have been a more universally popular man in the House of Commons than he hitherto has been. But I think the country has seen and has appreciated those qualities; and he is now the man looked to to take the lead in improvement; and my full and entire belief is that he will fulfil the expectations of the Country. (Applause.) No one can doubt his great political gifts; few will dispute that upon those subjects so important to the public welfare—a thorough knowledge of finance and taxation, and of the economy of all branches of the public expenditure—he is the man who possesses at once more knowledge than any one else, and a more resolute determination to give effect to that knowledge in a way which may be useful to the Country. (Cheers.) There is also no man I know who will go further in the maintenance of peace, and the continuance of that system of non-intervention which has met with general approval in the country, and has been carried out in so successful a manner by LORD STANLEY, the Foreign Minister of the present Government. (Applause.)

And now, Gentlemen, I am approaching a subject on which some of you have expressed a wish that I should speak, and on which I also wish to be heard. (Hear hear.) But before leaving the name of MR. GLADSTONE, although the Irish Church Question is one on which I may not altogether agree with him, allow me to say that with reference to his conduct on this question he has been in my judgment much maligned and misrepresented. There have been people who have said—“ Oh, you never would have heard anything

about the Irish Church Question from MR. GLADSTONE, if the Tories had not been in power, and if he had not wanted to get their places." (Hear, hear.) To my certain knowledge that is not true. I will mention what happened between him and myself; and I do so partly because it does justice to him, and partly because it will show you that my own mind has been more particularly addressed to that subject—one, of course, to which I always paid some measure of attention—for some years before the present time. In the year 1863, at a time when no one was bringing forward this question, or seemed very likely to do so, MR. GLADSTONE told me privately that he had made up his mind on the subject, and that he should not long be able to keep himself from giving public expression to his feelings. When any action on that subject might be necessary or practicable, he could not foresee; but he was then led to speak of it to myself, for reasons connected with the representation of the University of Oxford. That communication took me by surprise at the time; but from thenceforward I knew that his mind was made up upon the subject, in the sense to which he has lately given expression in Parliament; and his mind being so made up, whether we entirely agree with him or not, it would be the most extravagant absurdity and injustice in the world to say, that, when he saw a favourable opportunity of making a question practical, to which he attributed great importance, and on which he entertained a strong opinion, he was not right in taking advantage of that opportunity. (Hear, hear, and Cheers.) I believe from the bottom of my heart that his sole object in doing so was to serve the country according to his honest and sincere convictions, and not in any degree whatever to promote personal interests or objects of his own. (Cheers.) I come now, having said so much, to explain my own views on this subject. With regard to Ireland, I feel as everybody does, that it would be a great blessing indeed, not only to Ireland, but to Great Britain generally, if the means of reconciling the differences, whether of sentiment, or of any other kind which have so long existed between a great part of the Irish people and the people of this country, could be found; and if entire peace, contentment, and harmony could be produced between all parts of the United Kingdom. Certainly no greater blessing could be desired by any of us. For it is impossible not to feel very anxious at the constant chronic repetition of outbreaks, insurrections, seditions, and conspiracies in Ireland. (Hear, hear.) No more unhealthy state of things can exist, or can be conceived. It is not only the Fenian conspiracy we have to consider. That is the last, and, perhaps, the worst symptom of a state of things which has too long existed, and for which no doubt, if we could find any remedies, we should be more thankful than for almost any political blessing that could occur. (Hear, hear.) That is a feeling which I believe to be entertained by every right-thinking man in this country; but we

should also agree that it is not because we are anxious to apply a remedy to these evils, that we are to accept as a remedy everything which anybody proposes, without considering whether it is just—whether it is calculated to answer its intended object, and really to produce peace, harmony, and contentment; whether it is consistent with the primary duties and objects of Government, and whether it is likely or not to be productive in itself of other evils equally bad, or worse than those it is intended to cure. We must be satisfied with the remedies before we apply them. We must not take anything which any quack, for instance, might prescribe even for the most serious recognised disease. What is proposed should be intelligible in the first place, just in the second place, likely to answer its purpose in the third, and safe to the general interests of the country in the fourth. (Hear, hear, and applause.) I will illustrate what I have so far said by reference to what is called the land question. I am sure I should be truly thankful if any one would tell me what legislation concerning the land in Ireland, which will be consistent with the principles I have laid down, is possible and likely to do good. (Hear, hear.) All sorts of wild, visionary, suggestions are made, some of which appear to me to consist in this, that you are in some way or other to take away the land from those who now have it and to give it to somebody else. But, if even this scheme were carried out, would peace and harmony be the result? Would not there always remain plenty of people without land, who would consider that they had as much right to it as their neighbours, if the laws of property are to be set aside? By thus departing from the first principles of Government, by thus disregarding the rights of property, you would be disturbing and unsettling everything, without in the end satisfying or doing good to anybody. (Hear, hear.) All such schemes of confiscation I, for one, reject. (Applause.) I am most anxious to see the relation between landlord and tenant in Ireland placed upon a better basis; but I must first be satisfied as to the justice of the means by which this is to be done. (Hear, hear.) And, on this point, so much is said which I cannot understand, that it makes me quite determined, in so serious a matter, not to commit myself to any particular proposition, until I do understand it. (Applause.)

I now pass to the other question; that concerning the Irish Church. And you will pardon me, if I ask you to recollect that from the first time when I set my foot within the walls of Parliament, and long before I had the honour to represent Richmond, I was among the most uncompromising supporters, upon all occasions, of religious liberty and of political equality. (Applause.) And if there be any difficulties which I feel about this question of the Irish Church, undoubtedly it is not from any wavering in my adhesion to the principles of religious liberty or political equality.

The very first speech I made in Parliament, at a time when that question had made no great progress, was in favour of the admission of Jews to the House. (Hear.) When the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, as it is called, was introduced, to make it penal—although the law has never been put in force—for Roman Catholics to call their voluntary Bishops, in their unestablished Churches in Ireland and England, by such names as are convenient to them, I was one of the small minority in the House of Commons who resolutely opposed that measure; and I had the honour of being thanked for it by my Roman Catholic countrymen in Ireland. (Applause.) I have no disposition to make Roman Catholics an exception to the rule of religious liberty and political equality, as I understand it. More recently the question arose in Parliament when I was in office, whether a distinctive oath should be imposed on Roman Catholic Members of the House of Commons, by which they should be compelled to swear that they would support and maintain the Established Church, which no one else was compelled to do. It appeared to me to be inconsistent with the principle of political equality by which they were admitted to seats in the House, that any such peculiar oath should be exacted from them, and I felt that if the Established Church was to be maintained it must be maintained upon its merits, and not because a special oath was administered to Roman Catholics. (Hear, hear.) I took part in removing that oath, and in putting the Roman Catholics in that respect upon an equality with everybody else. (Cheers.) The same feeling actuated me in desiring to see Dissenters relieved in the way most satisfactory to themselves from the compulsory payment of Church-rates. (Cheers.) And the same feeling actuated me in making those recommendations which are now before the public, in the report of the Marriage Law Commissioners, for putting our marriage law upon a simple and uniform basis, without any difference whatever between different churches and religious denominations.

I refer to these things, that you may understand that it is no new profession for me to say that I favour political equality among all my fellow citizens, as well as the furthest possible extent of religious liberty. (Applause.) On the other hand, Gentlemen, far be it from me for a single moment to dissemble from you, that I am an attached member of the Church of England—that my attachment to that Church is among the dearest and the most cherished of my convictions—and that rather than be a traitor to that conviction, or a party to anything which, in my judgment, can tend to diminish the just, legitimate, and, as I think, salutary influence of the Church of England in this country, I would rather retire not only from the representation of Richmond, but from every possible scene of political honour and ambition. (Cheers.)

Well, then, when questions directly affecting the status of the Church are brought before Parliament, you will see that there are

in my mind principles, not conflicting in my judgment, but which tend, I think, to impose upon me very forcibly not only the duty, but the necessity, of trying to bring every argument and every proposition to the test of practical reason and justice.—(hear, hear,)—putting aside all mere sentiment on the one hand, and all personal and party considerations and interests on the other. (Applause.) Now, that is what I have tried to do with regard to this great question of the Irish Church, which the statesman to whom in politics I have been most attached, and to whom, personally, I am very much attached—I mean MR. GLADSTONE—has felt it his duty lately to bring before Parliament. I confess that I have felt very anxious indeed, on account of the magnitude of the interests involved in the agitation of this question; but I have endeavoured to do what I have just now said—to try every argument, and every proposition, which has been under consideration, by the test of my own practical reason. I have given you the result shortly, and in a form, of course, very little explanatory, in the address which is now upon your walls.

I will now endeavour to give some reasons for the views I have expressed in that address. And first it will be in your recollection that I have said, that for the sake, if it be possible, of removing political discontent in Ireland, and bringing about better relations between that country and our own, I should not be unwilling to support measures calculated to produce that end, even although they might involve changes of importance, affecting the political relations between the Church in Ireland and the State. Well, now, I will first tell you, I will try to do it concisely, the reasons which led me to that conclusion.

I cannot attribute any real, substantial value to the arguments which I have heard in Parliament, in favour of the proposition that changes of this nature are in principle, inadmissible. (Hear, hear.) I have heard that Her Majesty's Coronation Oath is an obstacle to her agreeing to any alteration of the status of the Established Church. Not only do I differ from that doctrine, but I think it is a doctrine most highly unconstitutional, tending to place Her Majesty in a false position with her people, and one certainly never designed by the framers of the oath. To imagine that it could have been intended by an act of Parliament, introduced in consequence of King James the Second's abuse of the executive power, to tie up for ever the course of legislation in this country on ecclesiastical subjects, and to make Parliament necessarily incompetent to change the law because the Sovereign was to be made incompetent to assent to such a change, is a proposition so monstrous and extravagant, that but for the certainty, that there have been and are some honest men who do entertain it, one would never have thought it could have been seriously brought forward. It is manifest that so long as the law fixes the rights and status of

the Established Church, the Queen is bound to maintain them, as she does other rights of her subjects, according to that law. But the power of legislation is a subject entirely foreign to the true meaning and intention of the oath. It is no more possible to restrain the Sovereign from assenting to an Act of Parliament on that subject, than upon any other which can be conceived. (Hear, hear.) That argument, therefore, has no weight with me. Nor is the argument founded upon the article in the Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland, which says that it is an essential part of the Union that the Church of Ireland should be for ever united with the Church of England, of much greater weight. What is that Act of Union? I agree it is a compact of a solemn and important kind, any alteration of which requires great consideration, and may involve great responsibilities; but after all, that Act of Union merely expresses the terms on which England and Ireland are to be united together; and if it be the general judgment of the majority of the people both of England and of Ireland that these terms ought to be revised, is any one to tell me that an Act of the Parliament of 1800, more especially remembering that then the Parliament of Ireland expressed only the opinion of a small minority of the Irish people, can for ever fetter the action of the Imperial Parliament, even when directed to the object of making the union not less real but more real, and not of disappointing, but of gratifying the desires and expectations of the majority of the people of Ireland? (Cheers.) It is quite evident that this argument also is one of so weak a character, that it is not really deserving of serious attention. Again, some people say that any material change in the political relations between the Church of Ireland and the State would interfere with the supremacy of the Crown. (Laughter.) Now, I am a lawyer, and therefore may flatter myself I ought at all events to be able to understand the meaning of these words; and if I do, I will venture to tell you that there are no words more frequently abused, and no subject about which greater nonsense is every day talked, than this subject of the supremacy of the Crown. I think I can readily make you understand it. It is the simplest thing in the world, resting upon what I may venture to call a fundamental principle. It is this, that her Majesty, as the head of the constitutional government, according to law, of this country, is supreme in all matters of which the law of the land takes cognizance. But then she is guided in all things by the law; and when the law is altered, the change does not violate Her supremacy, but merely alters the mode of its application. The true doctrine is well expressed in a form of words, used in the pulpits of our Universities and Cathedrals, that her Majesty is "over all persons, and in all causes, within these her dominions supreme;" not only supreme over the members of the Church of England, but, equally supreme over all Roman Catholics and Dissenters. The

Ecclesiastical law of an Established Church being part of the law of the land, the Queen is supreme in the Ecclesiastical, as well as in the other Courts. But all causes relating to the temporal concerns of non-established Churches, or even to their religious concerns involving temporal rights, are equally subject to the Queen's supremacy; though they are tried in temporal, and not in spiritual Courts. If, therefore, you disestablish a Church, previously established, you do not, in any degree whatever, interfere with or derogate from the Royal supremacy—you only cause it to be exercised in different Courts, and in a different manner.

I come to another point, on which a good deal has been said. There are some very excellent people, and there always have been for many centuries past, who have got this sort of an idea into their minds, that it is the abstract duty of a State to have some Established Church everywhere. I have never held that opinion, and I do not hold it now. (Hear, hear.) It appears to me to rest upon no solid grounds. It has been held on very opposite principles, by some who would make the Church dictate to the State in all things, and by others who would make the State trample upon the Church in all things. Both are, in my judgment, equally wrong; and I conceive the real truth to be this; that the right mode of promoting the interests of religion will vary according to circumstances, in different times and countries; and that State establishments for the promotion of religion, when they have been most clearly right, have not been founded upon any notion of abstract political necessity or duty, but have sprung up as the spontaneous growth of the religious convictions of the people, at the times when they arose. (Cheers.) That is the history of the establishments of religion which have taken place in most parts of Christendom; and if these establishments practically do good, if they do really promote the spiritual, the moral, and the social interests of the country at large—I don't mean in all things and everywhere, for that is impossible, but if that is their general tendency, as from my heart I believe it to be that of the Church Establishments of England and Scotland—there are then, I think, abundant grounds for maintaining those Church Establishments upon their merits: without at all asserting, that under all circumstances, or without reference to circumstances of time or place, if you would maintain the essence of national Christianity, you must have what is called a political establishment of religion. It presents, therefore, to my mind, a practical question, and not one to be decided by any abstract sentiments of this kind. All such sentiments, although we may have got so accustomed to them as to part with them unwillingly, ought in my judgment, to give way to any clearly established object of public benefit, proposed to be accomplished by means in accordance with justice. (Hear, hear.)

But having said that, I come to the second part of what I have

stated in my address. I distinguish altogether between the political establishment of religion, and the rights of property, which are expressed by the term endowment. I have said, that for the sake of restoring peace, contentment, and harmony in Ireland, I should not feel myself bound on principle to object to the appropriation of any surplus revenues now enjoyed by the Irish Church in places where they are disproportionate to the wants of any resident Protestant population, to purposes of general public utility. Now that appears to me an extremely different thing from disendowment. It assumes that the revenues are not wanted for the purposes for which they were intended, and do not practically do the good which they were meant to do in those places. Under these circumstances it seems to be agreed on all hands that there is no principle which obliges you to keep them where they are ; and that they may be withdrawn from those places, which were intended to receive benefit from them, but which do not derive from them the benefits which were meant to be conferred. The Irish Church Commission, of which you have no doubt heard, is generally understood to be likely to state, in the report which it is soon expected to issue, that there are many such places in Ireland, and that there is a considerable amount of such surplus revenues, practically doing no good. It is supposed that the Commission will recommend, that Parliament should take those revenues from those places, and apply them to other purposes, beneficial to the Protestants of the Established Church, in some other parts of Ireland ; and there I cannot but hold with MR. GLADSTONE, that if their present appropriation is not to continue, no Protestants in other parts of Ireland have any claim upon them. Any such transfer of these surplus revenues by the State would, in truth and substance, be a new endowment, and not the continuation of an old one. If, therefore, it would tend to promote the peace and welfare of Ireland to make some other appropriation of those surplus revenues, although I freely confess that I do not in the abstract like applying to secular uses that which has been once dedicated to the service of religion, yet I cannot see that there is any principle, necessarily binding me under such circumstances, which I ought to allow to stand in the way of the general good of Ireland. (Hear, hear.) But this brings me to a point, on which I may expect to find myself at variance with opinions which may prevail among many for whom I have a very great respect ; but I have made up my mind on the subject, and I now proceed to give you my reasons for it. I have said in my address, that I consider, that the provision now made for the Established Church ought to be allowed to remain, in those parishes and places in Ireland where its endowments are not disproportioned to the wants of the resident Protestant population. For this I have been criticised in a paper, to which I refer, because the criticism has been re-printed here, by the local press. I have no complaint to

make of that paper, (The Nonconformist); which is conducted with great candour and ability, or of the manner in which the critic speaks of myself personally. Of course, it could not be expected that my point of view would be the same with that of a writer, who is conscientiously opposed to all Church Establishments. But the writer thinks, that in the conclusion to which I have come, I have lost sight of the essential point in the case, the consideration of justice; and that the equality, at which it is necessary to aim, cannot be arrived at, if that conclusion is maintained. Now I, for my own part desire distinctly to deny that, in forming my opinion on this point, I have for a moment lost sight of the consideration of justice, which I also think ought to be the cardinal consideration in this matter. It is essentially because I believe my conclusion to be just, under all the circumstances of the case, that I have adopted it, and that I now give you my reasons for it. (Hear, hear.) I have said that there is a great distinction, in my mind, between endowment, and establishment—the political establishment of religion. Endowment, (in the sense in which the term is used in this controversy,) is the mere possession of property; it may be more or less, it may have come from public or from private sources. Endowments may be enjoyed, and are useful to be enjoyed, by non-established Churches as well as by those that are established. Most non-established Churches do enjoy them, in some manner and degree; and few would be unwilling to enjoy them more. It is, therefore, quite clear that the possession of property, permanently dedicated to the service of religion, is not inseparable from a political establishment of religion. A political establishment consists in the incorporation of the ecclesiastical law of the Church into the public law of the land, so that it becomes what LORD COKE called “The Queen’s Ecclesiastical Law,”—(Hear, hear,)—giving legal and coercive jurisdiction to the officers of the Church, to compel, by process of law, the execution of their own laws. Further, it consists in the grant of secular dignities, privileges, and functions (such as the seats of bishops in the House of Lords,) not recognized by law as belonging to the officers or institutions of any voluntary Church: and, on the other hand, it involves certain powers and prerogatives of the sovereign with regard to ecclesiastical appointments, and which may be thought to give something of a political character to those appointments. All these things depend upon State reasons for existence, and, for sufficient State reasons, may certainly be discontinued, without any injustice or hardship to any persons or classes. I can quite understand and admit the force of the argument, that to give, (as in Ireland) a political character to the Church of a very small minority of the people—to distinguish such a Church from all other religious bodies by political privileges, rank, and honour,—is inconsistent with sound notions of political justice; and that, under such circumstances, the cause of religion may

be promoted, rather than injured, by putting an end to so anomalous a state of things : especially when it is associated in the minds of the people with a former political ascendancy of the same minority, and its attendant evils, now happily passed away, on which we look back with horror and with the greatest possible concern. (Loud Cheers.)

I can therefore understand, and understanding I can yield, to the argument from justice, when it is applied to the abatement of political distinctions ; but it becomes quite another thing when the question is that of taking away property from people who are in possession of it, who are using it for purposes in themselves excellent, and to whose reasonable wants it is not disproportionate in amount. Here, again there might have been a view presented to the Country which might have led to results different from any which are now contemplated. It might have been said—" You ought to disestablish the Church of the minority, and to establish, in its stead, the Church of the majority, and to transfer the endowments, with the Establishment." I believe some of my friends, particularly one for whom I have a great respect and esteem, Mr. FOSTER, the Member for Bradford, in speaking on this subject, have said—" You ought to do in Ireland what you do in England and Scotland." (Hear, hear.) Well, but it must, for the moment have escaped those who so express themselves, that if we were to do in Ireland what we do in England and Scotland, we should not be simply taking away the endowments from the present Protestant Established Church, but we should give them to the Roman Catholics, and should make the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland—the Church of the great majority—the Established Church ; just as the Church of the majority is the Established Church in England, and also in Scotland. (Hear, hear.) Now, it is agreed on all hands that we are not to do that ; and I have told you that I acquiesce, upon that subject, in what appears to be the almost unanimous opinion of the country. There certainly is one point in connection with this part of the subject which puts all difficulty on that score aside, and it is this ; that the Roman Catholics don't ask it ;—(hear, hear,)—they don't claim it, they don't wish it ; they rather repudiate it, and this because they think that the necessary conditions of State establishment and State endowment in Ireland, if applied to their body, would bring them under State influence and control in a manner which might interfere with their ecclesiastical principles. We must, therefore, be brought at last to this conclusion, that we cannot, under these circumstances, do in Ireland exactly the same thing which we have done in Scotland and which we have done in England. (Hear, hear.)

And now the question becomes one of taking away from the members of the Established Church the property of which they are in possession in places, where it is not too much for their wants.

So viewed, it is a question of mere confiscation: It is not a question of competing claims; it is simply a question of taking away property for taking away's sake; and I cannot see the justice of that. (Hear, hear.) To give effect to a competing claim is one thing; but to take away that of which they are in possession, and of which they are making no bad use, which is wanted for their legitimate occasions, merely for the sake of taking it away, whatever else may recommend it, to my mind justice does not. And what is very remarkable is, that there is not, as far as I can understand, so much even as any definite secular purpose for which it is wanted:—I do not believe there is a man in this room who knows to what purpose it will be applied if it is taken away; and under such circumstances, I contend that those who are in possession of these endowments, not exceeding their wants, unless they have done something deserving of forfeiture, ought not to be deprived of them. But I wish to put the condition of those Irish Protestants before you a little more closely, because I do think, that the case they have is a very strong one. Who would be the real sufferers by this disendowment? Not the clergymen; for it is admitted by every one that it is only just that the incumbent should retain his living during the rest of his life: Everybody says that that is just. Those who would be the sufferers if the endowments were taken away, would be of course the permanent class who derive benefit from them—the class of Protestants I mean who belong to the Established Church in those parishes of which I have been speaking, where they are sufficiently numerous to want those spiritual ministrations, for which this provision has been made. (A remark was here made by one of those present, which was understood as suggesting that disendowment would be just, on the principle of retribution for past wrongs.) The honourable gentleman who interposes, reminds me of two lines which were used to describe a peculiar conception of justice, which prevailed in the early times of the French Republic—a sort of justice .

“Which visits ancient sins on modern times,  
“And punishes the Pope for Cæsar's crimes.”

(Great laughter and cheers.) The title of the Protestants, now in possession of these endowments dates back for three hundred years: and if wrong was done by the legislation, which gave them that possession, it is a wrong now three hundred years old. If anybody else had now a better claim to it—but you have all agreed that there is no competing claim to be recognised—it might be a different question: but the enjoyment of three hundred years at least is sufficient to put an end, in this, as in all other cases, to any inquiry into the original justice of the title. (A voice:—Let them provide for themselves, as others do.) It is very easy to say, why don't they, as other people have done, support themselves on

the voluntary principle? The answer to that is, that those whose systems of religion have been founded on the voluntary principle have formed their habits, their associations, and their whole organization, upon that principle: but those of whom I have been speaking are a class who have been led to rely for centuries upon this provision which has been made for them; and you cannot expect them to change their habits all at once, or easily to get into a position favourable for working upon the voluntary system. It is quite clear that those who have throughout relied upon a provision actually made cannot, at least for a long time—be expected to find means which would enable them to apply the voluntary system as advantageously as those who have always been accustomed to it. (Hear, hear.) Without for a moment losing sight of the distinction, (which is an important one,) between private and Church property, I still cannot avoid recognising the fact, that the permanent class, now in possession of this property, have a substantial interest in the continuance of that possession, and that if it were now withdrawn, they would either be deprived of the benefit of those spiritual ministrations to which they have been always accustomed, or sustain a direct pecuniary loss, by having to make good the deficiency out of their own means. When I find that they are good and loyal subjects—having done nothing to forfeit the property and using it for purposes not mischievous to the State—and when I also find that there is no competing claim—I cannot, I say, avoid coming to the conclusion, upon all grounds of reason and justice, that their possession ought to be respected. But I have a few more words to say on that subject yet.

A voice:—"Did not the Roman Catholics enjoy it for three hundred years, and have they not the same right to it then as the others?"

SIR ROUNDELL PALMER; Certainly if they were in the enjoyment of it now I would not be one for taking it away from them. (Hear, hear.) I don't wish you for one moment to suppose that when I spoke of there being no probability of establishing the Church of the majority, in Ireland, I spoke from any partial feeling against the Roman Catholic Church. (Hear, hear.) Do not misunderstand me on this point or think that I would do less justice to the Roman Catholics with respect to Maynooth College—although they have only held that endowment for I think about half a century—than to the Established Church. (Loud applause.) I do not think it would be right, having encouraged them to rely upon that provision for the education of their Clergy for many years, and to alter their former arrangements in connection with foreign colleges and universities,—I do not think it would be right to take it away without making them full and substantial compensation. I would give them the full benefit of the principle I have applied to the Established Church. (Applause.) I was just going to say, when the honourable

gentleman interrupted me, that with regard to Church endowment in Ireland, there are these circumstances to be remembered, as to places in which no disproportion exist between the Protestant population and the endowments. In the first place, the ancient part of the property consists of a charge upon the land, representing tithes, and by far the greater part of that land is in Protestant hands. The land has not been charged for other purposes; it has been charged for the religious provision of those parishes; and really it seems to me that even the owner of the land would have a better claim than strangers, to have his land altogether discharged from this burden, if it were no longer maintained for the purpose, beneficial to himself and his property, for which it was created. Then secondly, there are very considerable gifts of land, constituting, especially in the province of Ulster, the greater part of the Church endowments, which were entirely given after the Reformation. I agree that they were given by kings, and therefore, they were, in a sense, public endowments; but I would have you bear in mind that they were given under circumstances which make the case of the Irish Protestants very strong indeed. It was at that time thought the interest and the policy of England to encourage the settlement of Protestants from England and Scotland in Ireland. Emigration of English and Scotch Protestants was invited, and took place; and the whole province of Ulster was settled under James I, by Protestants in that way; these Church endowments being part of the advantages offered, in order to induce them to settle in that country. It would surely now be unjust to turn round and say, that, having established a Protestant population by these means, we should now deprive it of the property so given. At all events, I do not see how that can be done, if we are prepared to deal with this question in the spirit of liberality and generosity which has been advocated, and most eloquently advocated, in Parliament by MR. BRIGHT, and by MR. GLADSTONE himself. (Applause.)

A voice: I should like to make a convert of you before you leave Richmond on that subject. (Laughter and cheers.)

SIR ROUNDELL PALMER: With your permission I should like to make a convert of you first. (Great Laughter and Cheers.) I remember to have listened in the House of Commons with extreme interest to a speech made by MR. BRIGHT on this subject—a speech characterised by the most admirable spirit and the greatest moderation. He said in the course of that speech, as far as I remember his words, this: I would counsel the House and the country, to deal with the Protestants of Ireland in this matter, with the utmost consideration, with the greatest liberality, with the greatest generosity, and with the greatest tenderness, leaving to them the fabrics of all their Churches, and all their residence houses. And if you do act with that liberality and generosity, I think it will only be consistent, whilst you leave the edifices and the parsonages, to leave

also the means by which they are to be maintained. MR. GLADSTONE afterwards said, that modern private endowments ought also to be respected: and I have no reason to doubt that MR. BRIGHT concurred in this latter view. But surely, it makes no essential difference in principle, whether this or that part of the property now devoted to the maintenance of the Church, was originally given by a public or a private donor. Property given by public donation cannot, any more than what the law has allowed to be given by private persons to the same uses, be treated as revocable at any time, without regard to the just claims of those to whom it has been given. I wish you to see, how clearly the view taken by MR. GLADSTONE and MR. BRIGHT sets aside the principle, which some appear to advocate, that, because you cannot "level upwards," by endowing the Roman Catholics, you must therefore level "downwards," and produce an absolute equality in point of endowment, by taking away all endowments of public origin from those who now enjoy them. If that was the principle, you would not leave them the Churches or Residence houses, or anything that they could not show was a private modern gift. You would not leave them even St. Patrick's Cathedral, which has lately been restored and embellished by a private individual at such great cost. Everybody has felt that it would be a violation of the principles of truth and justice, to take that away; but that is only one illustration. All over the country private expenditure has been going on, in the building and restoration of Churches, and the augmentation of benefices: all in reliance upon the existing titles to Ecclesiastical property: everywhere private is mixed with public bounty. You admit that it is not necessary, in order to remove all just occasion for popular discontent, to take away their Cathedrals and Churches. Is it not rather a mockery, I ask, to say so, if you take away the means by which they are to be maintained? ("A voice: No one should be called to pay for another man's religion." (Cheers, interruption, and disapprobation.) I quite concur in that remark. The gentleman said something about compelling persons of one religion to contribute towards the support of another. That is just what is not done in Ireland. If there were a tax imposed on the people to compel them to pay for a religion they did not belong to, I could understand the question. But the question relates only to so much land, so much fixed real property, of which they have been in possession for hundreds of years, and to which no one can establish a preferable claim. To do this may, and I think must be felt as a wrong by the Protestants, and make them an aggrieved and discontented class; while it will do no good whatever to anybody else.

Now one word more before I sit down. Let me allude to the consequences which would arise from the adoption of a contrary

line to that which I have advocated—from a general disendowment, which I hope at least, will be very carefully considered before it is adopted. If the Irish Church is disestablished, and also disendowed, what then will be the relative position of Ireland towards England and Scotland? In England and Scotland one state of things will exist, but in Ireland there will be quite a different state of things; so that anything but equality will, in that case, flow from the present movement. If nothing but “levelling downwards,” nothing but this kind of equality will satisfy the claims of justice, the result cannot fail to be, that before long an endeavour will be made to withdraw the endowments from all the Established Churches throughout the United Kingdom. Well, everybody says that is not intended; and that the disestablishment of the Irish Church is consistent with a desire to strengthen the Established Churches of England and Scotland, and not to weaken them. I appeal, then to those, who really entertain that desire; I think it is a very strong reason for taking that course which would be least likely to be attended with dangerous consequences to the Established Churches in England and Scotland. I do not say that the apprehension of such consequences ought to stand in the way of anything which can be clearly proved to be necessary for the general welfare of the empire, and for real true justice to Ireland. But, when the question is, whether disendowment in Ireland should be carried to a length inconsistent, (in my view) with justice, and likely to increase rather than to allay discontent in that kingdom, this appears to me to be a consideration which ought not to be overlooked.—Whether these conclusions recommend themselves to your minds or not, it has been my duty to set them before you as being mine; and it is upon these terms only that I can engage to serve you in the coming Parliament. (Cheers.) I do not like to allude to any considerations personal to myself, but I am sure you will believe me when I say, that, if I were capable of yielding to motives of personal interest, they might rather dispose me to waive all points of difference with those with whom I have hitherto so cordially acted, and with whom on other subjects I hope to act still. (Hear, hear.) But upon matters which seem to me to involve the general interests of the country, and which touch deeply my own feelings and conscience, I am not prepared, for any personal or for any party objects whatever, to go to the right or to the left, or to do either more or less than that which my conscience allows me. (Loud and protracted cheering, during which SIR ROUNDELL PALMER sat down.)







